



HAMILTON
COUNTY
SCHOOLS

Charter School Handbook

2025 - 2026

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Introduction

Hamilton County Schools and the Department of Opportunity and Access, Charter Office, recognize that starting, managing, and sustaining a charter school is hard work, and requires tremendous commitment and determination, all within an often uncertain environment full of significant challenges. All of those who embark on this journey deserve our deepest respect for embracing the challenge of educating the next generation of students.

The power of charter schools to drive broader change is dependent on their ability to rise above the prevailing mediocrity. If charter schools serve only to expand parental choice without significantly raising the bar on student achievement, this innovative and ambitious reform will have little or no impact on the wider landscape of public education and it will only serve to ensure the neediest and most at-risk students will fall farther behind

This handbook is designed to provide guidance and information for potential and current charter school operators in Hamilton County Schools in accordance with Tennessee charter law and the Quality Authorizing practices of the State Board of Education.

Mission and Vision

Hamilton County Schools believes all children deserve the opportunity to thrive and experience a future without limits. In alignment with our Opportunity 2030, our **mission** is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and support to thrive in life. Authorizing high quality charter schools is one of numerous strategies employed by the district to ensure fulfillment of this mission. The HCS Charter School Office will practice rigorous charter school authorization, provide meaningful support, and protect school choice in order to uphold high academic standards, create fair and equitable opportunities, and improve outcomes for students and families in Hamilton County.

Our **vision** in Hamilton County Schools is to be a leader in developing our diverse graduates to be connected, competitive, and life ready. We are certain that all of our

authorized charter schools, as well as our traditional schools, are focused on every student reaching their full potential.

Our **core values** for charter authorizing are as follows:

- Keeping students and their needs the primary focus
- Defending the public trust with authorizing practices that are fair and transparent
- Striving for inclusive practices and engagement
- Holding all stakeholders accountable both to state law and best practice as defined in the NACSA Principles and Standards
- Developing and nurturing healthy relationships
- Modeling visionary and innovative leadership that empowers staff and students
- Communicating effectively with charter schools, potential applicants, district personnel, school board members, parents, and community
- Encouraging and creating an environment that promotes high quality schools and sharing of best practices

It is our hope that this handbook will provide our charter schools and potential charter applicants with the assistance necessary to create and sustain high quality schools that will empower and encourage students to reach their highest potential.

Commitment to Quality Authorizing

Hamilton County Schools has aligned its practices with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Principles and Standards, which can be found at [Principles-and-Standards.pdf](#)

As such, HCS commits to the following:

1. **Commitment and Capacity** - HCS will:
 - a. communicate a clear mission for quality authorizing;
 - b. provide communication that supports our board, leadership, and staff in understanding the three core principles of authorizing and the current performance of each of its schools;
 - c. evaluate its work on a regular basis against national standards for Quality Authorizing and Tennessee State Board of Education guidance; and
 - d. engage in ongoing training and professional development to build staff capacity.

2. **Application Process and Decision-Making** - HCS will:
 - a. develop and regularly update a Request for Proposals document that

provides charter school operators with clear guidance on the strategic priorities of Hamilton County Schools;

- b. ensure an application process that is rigorous, thorough, and transparent;
- c. organize and train review teams with both internal and external evaluators; and
- d. welcome proposals from first-time applicants as well as existing school operators/replicators.

3. Performance Contracting - HCS will:

- a. endeavor to execute a contract with each charter governing board that articulates the rights and responsibilities;
- b. collaborate with charter school administrators and governing board attorneys to ensure mutual understanding of the terms and conditions; and
- c. clearly articulate the performance standards created in conjunction with national best practice and aligned with the Tennessee State Board of Education Quality Charter Authorizing Standards policy.

4. Ongoing Oversight and Evaluation - HCS will:

- a. design and implement a comprehensive pre-opening checklist articulating the necessary elements to open after approval;
- b. design and implement a comprehensive performance accountability and monitoring system defined by the charter contract with necessary information to make rigorous and standards-based expansion, modification, renewal, revocation, and intervention decisions;
- c. clearly communicate the oversight and evaluation process to schools;
- d. provide clear technical guidance to schools as needed to ensure timely compliance with applicable rules and regulations;
- e. visit each school at least once per year;
- f. provide Charter School Annual Reports to schools and stakeholders, and ensure that such reports are available to the district website for public review;
- g. require from each school an annual financial audit, conducted by a qualified independent auditor; and
- h. give schools clear, adequate, evidence-based notice of charter agreement/application violations, ensuring they are aware of the types of actions and consequences that may occur.

5. Revocation and Renewal Decision-Making - HCS will:

- a. Design and implement a transparent and rigorous process that uses comprehensive academic, operational, and financial data to make

- merit-based renewal and revocation decisions;
- b. Provide to each school, in advance of a renewal decision, a cumulative performance report summarizing the school's performance over the charter term and its prospects for renewal;
- c. Clearly communicate to schools the criteria for charter revocation, renewal, and non-renewal decisions in a manner consistent with the charter agreement, state applications, and Board policy;
- d. Promptly communicate renewal or revocation decisions to the school community and public within a timeframe that allows parents and students to exercise their choices for the upcoming school year;
- e. Revoke charters when necessary to protect student and public interest; and
- f. design and implement fair and transparent closure processes.

Chapter 1: Relationship to the District

School Choice Office and Charter Schools

The school choice office of Hamilton County Schools serves as the charter school authorizing staff, as well as support for the district's current charter schools. The **mission** of the HCS Charter School Office is the office will practice rigorous charter school authorization, provide meaningful support, and protect school choice in order to uphold high academic standards, create fair and equitable opportunities, and improve outcomes for students and families in Hamilton County.

According to the Tennessee State Board of Education Quality Charter Authorizing Standards, a quality authorizer sets high standards for approving charter applicants, maintains those high standards for the schools it oversees, effectively cultivates quality charter schools that meet identified educational and community needs, oversees charter schools that over time meet performance standards and targets on a range of measures and metrics set forth in the charter agreement, renews charter schools that meet those performance standards, and closes schools that fail to meet those standards, in accordance with state law.

The Hamilton County Board of Education makes all decisions related to approving, renewing, or closing charter schools within Hamilton County, with the charter school office providing them with the necessary information to make those decisions.

As an authorizer, our primary role is to hold schools accountable for student outcomes while preserving their autonomy which is granted under Tennessee charter law. We do this through our new school application and renewal processes, as well as ongoing progress monitoring and annual feedback. In addition to our authorizing role, we are also committed to helping ensure that all students in Hamilton County succeed,

regardless of what type of school they attend. Therefore, the charter school office also offers optional supports to the charter schools it authorizes, including peer site visits and federally and state required professional development opportunities that are offered through the district. Ultimately, however, it is a charter school’s governing board that is responsible for, and will be held accountable to, student outcomes, regardless of the supports the district provides.

There are also other Hamilton County Schools departments that are assigned to both support and hold accountable our charter schools, including, but not limited to, finance, special education, and human resources.

Department	Contact	Email	Phone
Charter School Office	Jim Boles, Director of Access & School Choice	boles_jim@hcde.org	498-6762
	Fannie Moore, Charter School Coordinator	moore_f@hcde.org	498-6762
	Jennifer Workman, Administrative Assistant	workman_j@hcde.org	498-6762
Opportunity and Access	Dr. Neelie Parker, Chief of Opportunity and Access	Parker_N@hcde.org	498-7149
Finance	Mary Ellen Heuton, Chief	Heuton_M@hcde.org	498-7026
	Kim Myers, Director of Accounting	myers_k@hcde.org	498-7154
	Lizetta Eitner, Senior Accountant	eitner_l@hcde.org	498-7354
Federal Grants	Angelia Askins, Director	Askins_Angelia@hcde.org	498-7098
	John Thomas,	g	498-7108

	Coordinator Jessica Birdsong Coordinator	thomas_john@hcde.org birdsong_jessica@hcde.org	867-6202
ESL	Diego Trujillo, Director Marisol Jimenez, Coordinator	Trujillo_Diego@hcde.org jimenez_fulvia@hcde.org	498-7132 498-7252
Exceptional Education	Michelle Eargle Executive Director Russell Meredith, Ex Ed/Charter Liaison Cassie Foster Ex Ed Behavior Coordinator	eargle_michelle@hcde.org meredith_russell@hcde.org foster_cassandra@hcde.org	498-6778 498-7241
504	Amy Still 504 Coordinator	still_amy@hcde.org	498-6794 (o) 421-8582 (c)
CTE	Olivia Bagby, Future Ready Director David Crane, CTE Assets & Compliance Manager	bagby_olivia@hcde.org crane_david@hcde.org	498-7178
Testing and Accountability	Cheryl Ladd, Testing Coordinator Tammy Carneim, Coordinator Becca Smith, Director of Data	ladd_cheryl@hcde.org carneim_tammy@hcde.org smith_becca@hcde.org	498-7110 498-6726 498-6725

PowerSchool	Brian Seay, SIS Manager	seay_brian@hcde.org	498-7109
Human Resources	Zac Brown, Chief Talent Officer	Brown_Z@hcde.org	498-7056

Compliance

Each charter school is expected to comply with all applicable state and federal laws as outlined in Tennessee charter school law, and it is the responsibility of the charter school office to ensure that schools are aligned to those laws as well as requirements of both our team and other district departments.

There will be clear escalation procedures for each deadline not met, or non-compliance with established law or the charter agreement. We encourage you to proactively reach out to us for any support needed in order to meet reporting deadlines or established law.

Requests for Proposals

HCS seeks new school proposals for existing school operators/replicators that offer all the following:

1. Create innovative educational structures that are not already offered within the district and that enhance the positive culture of Hamilton County Schools.
2. Advance academic achievement for a diverse range of learners through excellent instruction that reaches all students, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, proficiency in English, academic ability, social capital, and family income.
3. Add to and do not diminish the number of schools with diverse student enrollment in Hamilton County.
4. Indicate a willingness to collaborate with the authorizing LEA to align the goals and performance outcomes to the mission and vision of HCS.

For a full outline of new start application guidance, timelines, and the district's Request

for Proposal, please visit [Charter Schools – HCS District Website](#)

Chapter 2: Charter School Legislation

Tennessee Charter School Act

The Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002 establishes nine (9) major purposes for the creation of charter schools. They are:

- Improve learning for all students and close the achievement gap between high and low students
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, and provide greater decision making authority to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance
- Measure performance of pupils and faculty, and ensure that children have the opportunity to reach proficiency on state academic assessments
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers
- Afford parents substantial, meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children
- Provide an alternative means within the public school system for ensuring accomplishment of the necessary outcomes of education by allowing the establishment and maintenance of public charter schools that operate within a school district structure but are allowed maximum flexibility to reach their goals
- Provide both the state department of education and local school systems with options relative to the governance and improvement of high priority schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress as outlined in both §49-1-602 and the Federal Elementary and Secondary Elementary Act (20 U.S.C. §6301 et seq.).
- Provide both the state department of education and local school systems with options relative to the delivery of instruction for those students with special needs as specified in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.).
- Provide local school systems the option to work in concert with the state’s public higher education institutions to establish charter school “laboratories of teaching and learning” as a means of fostering educational innovations for implementation statewide.

Legal Liabilities

As a charter school, the school retains primary legal liability. This liability does not transfer to the District, giving charter schools considerable autonomy. This includes the following areas as cited in Tennessee Charter Law and the Hamilton County Charter Contract:

- **Compliance** - The school’s governing body shall have full authority and

responsibility, including ultimate responsibility for school fiscal, legal and contractual compliance matters, as is appropriate to a Tennessee charter school and Tennessee nonprofit corporation and all authority and responsibility necessary or proper to exercise the powers granted by this Contract or by law.

- **Fiduciary Oversight** - The school's governing body shall have, understand, and meet the fiduciary duties imposed on such bodies by operation of law and shall, conversely, enjoy all individual immunities from liability provided by law. Nothing in the [Charter] Contract may be construed as a waiver of individual immunity from liability, in any form, granted by law to a school director, employee, volunteer, agent or representative.
- **Operations** - The school will be fiscally responsible for its own operations and will have authority to independently exercise the following powers together with such powers as provided for elsewhere in the Charter Contract or charter law: contracting for goods and services; preparation of budgets; selection, supervision, evaluation, and determination of compensation for personnel; promotion and termination of personnel; leasing facilities for school purposes; accepting and expending gifts, donations, or grants of any kind in accordance with such conditions prescribed by the donor as are consistent with law and the Charter Contract; and adoption of policies and bylaws consistent with the terms of the Charter Contract and Tennessee law.
- **Employment and Personnel** - Neither the school nor its employees, agents, nor contractors are employees or agents of the District; and neither the District nor its employees, agents, or contractors are employees or agents of the school. None of the provisions of the Charter Contract will be construed to create a relationship of agency, representation, joint venture, ownership, or control of employment between the Parties of the Charter Contract other than that of independent Parties contracting solely for the purpose of effectuating the Charter Contract. It is established law that Tennessee is a right-to-work state and charter schools as non-profits may establish their own pay scales, bonuses, merit increases, etc., without interference from the district. It is also established that teachers who work for a charter school work for that non-profit entity, and the district is not responsible for conditions of employment or termination of employment.

- **Legal Action** - The school agrees to indemnify and hold the District, its Board members, officers, employees, and agents harmless from all liability, claims and demands arising from any suit, action, grievance, charge or proceeding brought in connection with or related to the school's operation or the conduct of any of the school's employees, agents, or representatives.

Contracting

Timeline

After the Hamilton County Board of Education approves the initial new school or renewal of a school's charter, the office of charter schools and the schools begin the process of negotiating the terms of a new contract. The process also includes setting conditions and/or benchmarks for which the school will be held accountable during the term of the contract. The charter agreement for a public charter school shall be in writing, contain all material components of the application, and be for a charter term of ten (10) academic years, beginning on the first day of instruction. This process typically begins immediately after the Hamilton County Board of Education approves a school. The HCS School board must approve the charter agreement before it is signed by both parties.

Amendments

During a contract term, charter school operators may petition to amend the material terms of the charter agreement. As provided in [T.C.A. §49-13-110](#), the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (Charter Commission) has outlined the process in [Rule 1185-01-01-.04](#).

A "material modification" to a charter agreement is defined as a substantive change to the terms of the charter agreement regarding a charter school's governance, financial, operational, or academic structure. Material modifications include but are not limited to:

- A change in governance structure (including, but not limited to, a change in the nonprofit entity governing the school), or addition of or changes to the charter management organization.
- The addition or removal of a grade level or levels.
- Changes in student enrollment that fall outside of the minimum or maximum enrollment thresholds set forth in the charter school's charter agreement.
- The addition or removal of a plan to provide transportation to students attending the charter school.
- Changes to the charter school's location, if outside the geographic area set

forth in the charter agreement.

- Changes to the charter school's academic focus set forth in the charter agreement.
- Changes identified in the charter agreement as material modifications or amendments.

There are two steps to the process: a Letter of Intent followed by the Amendment Petition. Details for submission, including the forms, are provided by the SBE and can be found on their [Charter School Applications webpage](#). There are two submission windows annually. The requests should be in the year preceding the school year in which the proposed amendment is to take effect.

	Fall Submission	Spring Submission
Letter of Intent Deadline	September 1	January 15
Amendment Petition Deadline	October 1	February 14

**If the date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or state-observed holiday, the submission is due the next business day on or before 11:59 pm CST.*

Charter school operators may submit an emergency amendment petition at any time if good cause exists. The proposed amendments will be reviewed by the charter review committee, and a recommendation will be submitted to the HCSBOE. The HCSBOE will have final voting authority on all amendments.

For more information regarding contract amendments, please contact the Charter Schools Coordinator at choosehamilton@hcde.org

Chapter 3: Quality Assurance and Accountability

Initial Charter School Approval Process

All applicants must file a Letter of Intent at least 60 days prior to the application deadline of February 1st. This letter must be delivered to the local board of education and the Tennessee Charter School Commission no later than **December 3rd**. *Note: Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent before submitting an application. When the December 3rd deadline falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or*

State observed holiday, the application materials are due the next business day.

Applications are due no later than February 1 of each year, by close of business, the year preceding the year in which the proposed public charter school plans to begin operation. In accordance with Tennessee law, all applications that are considered complete will be reviewed by a review team chosen by the charter school coordinator, and representative of the community and the district. The team is chosen based on their knowledge of charter schools and expertise in each specialized area the team will review. Team members participate in mandatory training before beginning the review process.

Applicants interested in applying should look on the Tennessee Department of Education's website for the application and scoring rubric (<https://www.tn.gov/education/families/school-options/charter-schools.html>)

Electronic copies should be sent to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission following their guidelines and to HCS via choosehamilton@hcde.org. Three (3) hard copies should be sent to:

Attn: Department of School Choice
Hamilton County Schools
3074 Claude Ramsey Pkwy
Chattanooga, TN 37421

The timelines are as follows:

Deadline	Item
December 3 (or next business day)	Letters of Intent are due to both the charter office for Hamilton County Schools and the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission.
February 1 (or next business day)	Complete applications are due to the charter office for Hamilton County Schools and the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. HCS requires 3 printed copies and 1 electronic copy. Applications must be accompanied by a \$2,500.00 application fee made out to Hamilton County Schools.

February - March	Independent Application Review by HCS Charter Review Committee, Charter Review Committee meets to analyze independent reviews and prepare for Capacity Interview.
March - April	Conduct Capacity Interview, Charter Review Team meets to develop consensus on the rubric, the HCS staff completes the recommendation report.
April	Findings Report submitted to HCS Board of Education, BOE votes on charter school applications within 90 days of receipt of an application.

- If the Board of Education votes to approve a charter application, the district will immediately enter into contract negotiations with the charter school.
- In the event the BOE votes to deny the application, the applicant may choose to amend. The applicant has 30 calendar days from the day of the board vote to submit an amended application. The same review team will review the amended application and submit a new recommendation to the BOE for their consideration.
- In the event the Board of Education votes to approve the amended application, the district will immediately enter into contract negotiations with the charter school.
- In the event the BOE denies the amended application, the applicant has ten (10) days to appeal to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission.

Strong charter school applications include a comprehensive educational program, a solid business plan, and a clear plan for effective governance and operations. They may also reflect an array of pedagogical philosophies and practices. Each application is treated as a separate and free standing proposal, and applications are not compared to each other or to prior applications when scoring the rubric against the Department of Education criteria.

Additional Application Logistics

The proposal must follow the Charter School Application as found on the TDOE website. The application describes the sections that apply to new charters and replications. Applicants should look closely at the application scoring rubric also found on the TDOE website. The scoring rubric outlines the criteria under which reviewers will evaluate each section. Potential charter operators can find the current state scoring rubric (once released each year) and additional application

assistance on [HCS Charter School Website](#)

The Hamilton County Schools will provide guidance when specific requests are made. HCS authorizers will meet with potential applicants *by appointment* to clarify expectations and answer questions. This guidance, if requested, should be considered carefully in crafting the final application and may include references to the law or other resources that may be necessary for developing the application, meeting deadlines, and/or indicating specific documents that must be submitted as part of the application.

Hamilton County Schools will be impartial to all potential applicants seeking assistance. HCS will not compose application sections for applicants or complete research and development for which the applicant is responsible. Applicants must take full accountability for what is written and submitted to HCS. HCS has developed a [website](#) to provide charter school information, FAQs, and appropriate contact information for developing and submitting a charter school application. In addition, the State of Tennessee: Office of Charter School website also offers guidance, as well as necessary forms. Before requesting an appointment applicants are encouraged to consult the [website for additional information](#). All charter school application materials can be found on the website.

After the Letter of Intent is received, full application proposals are due no earlier than 60 days after submission **of the Letter of Intent but no later than the close of business on February 1 in** the year preceding the year in which the proposed public charter school plans to begin operation. Late or incomplete applications will be returned at the applicant's expense or destroyed after 30 days. Applications must be accompanied by a \$2,500.00 application fee made out to Hamilton County schools, which will be used to defer the cost to review the application. If an application is insufficient and is returned to the applicant without review, HCS will return the fee. Once the review process has begun, the fee is nonrefundable. All submitted proposals become public record after submission to HCS. Submission of a proposal is an official waiver of confidentiality.

If the review team deems that an application requires an amendment, **applicants should submit to the above entities** the same number of copies of any updates or revisions **as original applications**. Please note that no additions or revisions will be accepted during the initial ninety-day application review process.

Amending Applications Denied In The First Application

T.C.A. § 49-13-108 provides applicants 30 days from the date of receipt of denial to

submit an amended application to correct deficiencies. The HCS Board of Education has 60 days after receiving the amended application to deny or approve the **amended** application based on the recommendation of the review team.

The same review team that read and made recommendations on the initial application will evaluate the amended applications. They will determine if the deficiencies have been corrected and recommend that the HCS Board of Education approve or deny the application.

Deadline	Item
April	HCS will send a letter to the applicant regarding the denial.
May	Amended application due to HCS no later than close of business 30 days from the date of receipt of denial letter.
May - June	Independent Application Review by HCS Charter Review Committee, Charter Review Committee meets to analyze independent reviews and to develop consensus on the rubric, the HCS staff completes the recommendation report.
June - July	The recommendation report is shared with the HCS Board of Education.
July	HCS Board of Education votes on the Charter School Recommendation.
July	If the HCS Board of Education denies the Amended Application, the applicant will have ten (10) days to appeal to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission.

Performance Framework

The charter school office has adopted the state's performance framework, which includes solid evaluation criteria for the schools. In accordance with Tennessee charter law and the state's quality authorizing standards, the performance framework accomplishes the following:

- Establishes the performance standards under which each charter school will be evaluated, using objective and verifiable measures of student achievement as the primary measure of school quality;

- Defines clear, measurable, and attainable academic, financial, and organizational performance standards and targets that the school must meet as a condition of renewal, including but not limited to state and federal measures;
- Includes expectations for appropriate access, education, support services and outcomes for students with disabilities;
- Defines the source of academic data that will form the basis for ongoing and renewal evaluation, including state-mandated and other standardized assessments, student academic growth measures, and performance comparisons with other public schools in the district and state; and
- Defines sources of organizational data that will form the evidence basis for ongoing and renewal evaluation, focusing on fulfillment of legal obligations, fiduciary duties, operational goals that support the attainment of academic benchmarks, and sound stewardship of public dollars.

The charter office will make school visits at least each semester, and will adopt a written reporting format that is transparent and specific, so schools will be aware of any deficiencies well in advance of the renewal year. It is the policy of the charter office to work with the schools to correct any deficiencies noted in the annual visits, as well as offer guidance and support to each school as needed. The HCS Performance Framework can be found [here](#).

Interim Review (5 year)

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-121(k), a charter school authorizer is required to conduct an interim review of a charter school in the fifth year of a school's initial period of operation and in the fifth year following any renewal of a charter agreement, in accordance with guidelines developed by the State Board of Education.

An overview of the interim review process and interim report guidance for operators can be found in the [Charter School Interim Review Protocol](#).

Renewal of the Charter School

In accordance with Tennessee charter law, each charter school is initially awarded a contract for ten (10) years, beginning with the year the school opens.

No later than April 1 of the year prior to the renewal year in which the charter expires, the governing body of the charter school will submit a renewal application. Three months prior to that submission, the Hamilton County charter school office

will submit to the charter school a performance report reflective of the renewal evaluation.

All charter schools undergo a rigorous renewal process led by the charter school office during the final year of their charter term. Renewal recommendations are made based upon a body of evidence around the school's academic and organizational performance.

Evidence Collection

The charter school office bases the renewal process on thorough analysis of a comprehensive body of evidence defined by the performance framework and the charter contract. That evidence includes, but is not limited to:

- The renewal application;
- The performance report submitted to the charter school three months prior to the renewal application due date;
- A renewal site visit that includes classroom observations, teacher and leader interviews, and student and parent focus groups;
- An examination of school governance and financial sustainability, including a board meeting visit, board chair interviews, and a comprehensive financial analysis. The financial analysis will include a review of past audits, plus an in-depth look at any financial discrepancies noted by the finance team;
- A comprehensive analysis of student academic outcomes; and
- An in-depth evaluation of student, parent, and community satisfaction with the school.

The most important criteria in renewal decision making is student growth and achievement as measured on the performance framework. The renewal process gives charter schools the opportunity to present clear and compelling evidence regarding how well they are serving their students. It also provides the school an occasion to examine progress towards meeting its mission and vision, assess both its strengths and its needs, and plan a strategy for continuous improvement and future needs.

The charter school office will summarize the renewal findings with recommendations in a report to the school and will submit those recommendations to the Hamilton County Board of Education for a decision no later than February 1 (or next business day) of the renewal year, as required by Tennessee Charter law (§ 49-13-121).

Process Differentiation

While all schools must go through renewal, there are a few ways in which the process may be differentiated as follows:

- For schools operating with a CMO/EMO, the renewal process will also include an assessment of the CMO/EMO organizational capacity as it applies to the school(s) up for renewal.
- Consistently high-performing schools can expect a shorter site visit and a streamlined renewal application.

While Tennessee charter law does not allow partial or conditional renewal, the summary document may include recommendations from the review evaluation to the school for their consideration.

Expansion and Replication

Hamilton County Schools shall consider requests for charter school expansions and charter school replications only after one (1) or more of the charter schools operated by the charter school operator has been in operation for at least three (3) academic years. All requests for charter school expansions and shall be subject to state law and Board policy. All requests for charter school replications shall be subject to state law and the rules and regulations of the Tennessee State Board of Education.

1. **Criteria Charter School Expansion Requests:** In conjunction with its priorities set forth in the district strategic plan and assessments of fiscal impact, the Board shall use the following criteria to determine whether to approve a charter school expansion request:
 - a. A charter school operator that operates a single-site charter school will have its request for expansion recommended to the Board for approval if the school's most recent score is "Meets Standards" in each of the three core components (i.e., academic, operational, and financial) of the Performance Framework.
 - b. A charter school operator that operates two or more schools or campuses will have its request for expansion recommended to the Board for approval if each of the operator's schools or campuses have a score of "Meets Standards" in each of the three core components (i.e., academic, operational, financial) of the Performance Framework *and* the school or campus the operator is seeking to expand is not on an

Action Plan.

2. **Criteria For Charter School Replication Requests:** A request to replicate an existing district-authorized charter school shall be submitted as a new start charter school application that is subject to the requirements and timelines established by law and Board policy for approving or denying a newly established charter school. In conjunction with the TDOE rubric and the priorities set forth in the district strategic plan and assessments of fiscal impact, the Board shall use the following criteria to determine whether to approve an application to replicate a charter school:

- a. A charter school operator that operates a single-site charter school will have its request for replication recommended to the Board for approval if the school's most recent test score is "Meets Standards" in each of the three core components (i.e., academic, operational, and financial) of the Performance Framework.

- b. A charter school operator that operates two or more schools or campuses will have its request for replication recommended to the Board for approval if each of the operator's schools or campuses have a score of "Meets Standards" in each of the three core components (i.e., academic, operational, financial) of the Performance Framework *and* none of the schools or campuses operated by the operator is seeking to replicate are on an Action Plan.

Performance Monitoring

The authorizer will make rigorous and standards-based decisions using the Tennessee State Board of Education's currently adopted performance framework.

Performance monitoring includes:

- Ongoing monitoring for compliance including documenting when compliance is not met, or schools fall below standards.
- Authorizer consultation with charters as they correct discrepancies to meet compliance.
- An annual performance review.

NACSA's three core principles guide all aspects of Hamilton County Schools' work

for charter authorizing. The three core principles are:

- Maintaining high standards for all schools,
- Upholding high performing school's autonomy, and
- Protecting students and public interest.

Hamilton County Schools will monitor schools regularly based on their individual needs in academics, operations, and finance. High-performing schools will meet the following criteria:

- Student success rate: ELA and Math at or above the district averages.
- No financial findings in the yearly audit.
- Submission of required information and reports on time.

To effectively monitor each school, Hamilton County School personnel will do the following:

- Conduct at least two site visits per year.
- Conduct a Performance Review each year.
- Documentation and assurance items will be monitored throughout the year via Epicenter, the Charter Office's online document collection and compliance management system.
- Conduct a 5-year review.
- Administer a summative report 90 days prior to each charter's ten-year renewal deadline.
- Meet with Charter personnel on a consultative basis as often as needed.
- Attend the public Charter School Board meetings as often as possible.
- Provide updates regarding policies, deadlines, or other items of interest to Charters through newsletters.
- Forward pertinent information to Charter Schools.
- Connect Charter School personnel with the appropriate resources.

Charter School Deficiencies and Closure

School closure is never an ideal outcome, and it is never the first response to a charter school that might be struggling. However, it is sometimes necessary in order to improve student access to high-quality schools. HCS is committed to high expectations for all schools, district-run and charter, and will take action if necessary, based on low academic performance, financial mismanagement, or severe operational deficits.

However, prior to taking such a drastic measure as closure, the charter school office will closely work with the charter school leadership and governing board to remediate any deficiencies.

Our procedures for working with struggling schools are as follows:

Procedures for Addressing Deficiencies in Charter School Performance

Status*	Possible Triggers	Possible Actions/Consequences
Notice of Concern	Signs of weak performance: identified through routine monitoring, through implementation, compliance, or performance review, or by other means identified by HCS	Letter to the governing board detailing areas of concern
Notice of Deficiency	Failure to meet multiple performance targets; Failure to comply with applicable state laws and/or district policies; Failure to comply with terms of the charter contract.	Letter to the governing board detailing areas of deficiency with a requirement that a Performance Improvement Plan is developed and implemented (with specific improvements, objectives, timelines, measures). The Performance Improvement Plan must be approved by the charter school office.
Notice of Probation	Continued failure to meet performance targets; failure to meet objectives set forth in the Performance Improvement Plan; continued failure to comply with applicable state laws and/or district policies; continued failure to comply with conditions of the charter agreement	Letter to governing board to serve as notification of probationary status and outlining terms of probation; charter school office creates a Corrective Action Plan with the charter school that addresses deficits and has measurable outcomes, and a timeline with <u>very specific improvement expectations</u> .
Charter Review	Failure to successfully address the terms of the probation; material violation of any conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter agreement; flagrant disregard of the charter agreement; failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; extended pattern of failure to comply with applicable law. (TCA 49-13-122(b)(1-3)). Additionally, an expanded pattern of failure to comply with the terms of the charter, or inclusion on the Priority list of the bottom 5% of	Recommendation to revoke, or not to revoke, the charter, or impose lesser sanctions (at this, or any point in the process, a school may also voluntarily surrender its charter).

	schools in the state may trigger a review or a closure.	
Charter Revocation	<p>Charter Review results in recommendation to revoke or school has done any of the following: committed a material violation of any conditions, standards or procedures set forth in the charter agreement; failed to meet or make adequate yearly progress toward achievement of the state's accountability system; failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management.</p> <p>Except in cases of fraud, misappropriation of funds, flagrant disregard of the charter agreement or the provisions of chapter 49-13-122 or similar misconduct, a decision to revoke shall become effective at the close of the academic year.</p>	Letter stating reasons for proposed revocation to the governing board. Revocation to take place at the end of the school year unless an immediate closure must take place under the terms outlined in charter law § 49-13-122.
*NOTE: The outlined procedures are <u>not</u> a step by step process. The Charter School Office reserves the right to put schools at any status without going through the steps if more immediate actions are warranted.		

If the HCS Board of Education or the school decides to close a charter school, the charter school office and the school work closely together to protect the interests of students and families, as well as to ensure public funds are managed appropriately.

According to Tennessee charter law TCA § 49-13-122, an authorizer may revoke a public charter school agreement if the school receives identification as a priority school, and this revocation may take place immediately following the close of the school year in which the school is identified as a priority school.

A charter school may be revoked at any time for the following reasons:

- Committed a material violation of any conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the charter contract;
- Failure to meet or make sufficient progress toward the performance expectations set forth in the charter contract; or
- Failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management

Upon reaching the decision to close a charter school, the charter school office has three primary goals to accomplish:

- Provide educational services in accordance with the charter contract until the end of the school year, or the agreed upon date when instruction will cease.
- Reassign students to schools that meet their educational needs.
- Address the school's financial, legal and reporting obligations.

These goals have the highest priority during the closure process. The charter school office will work closely with the school's governing board prior to the beginning of closure proceedings to agree on which tasks are necessary and outline how it intends to supervise the closure. Responsible parties and completion dates will be agreed upon to ensure a transparent and smooth closure, and the charter school office staff will attend parent and community meetings to explain not only the mechanics of the closure process, but exactly why the school is being closed.

Charter School Waiver

Waivers submitted as part of the charter school application process will be approved for the term of the charter agreement. Additionally, according to [T.C.A. §49-13-111](#), a public charter school may apply to either the authorizer or to the Commissioner of Education for a waiver of any state board rule or statute that inhibits or hinders the charter school's ability to meet its goals and comply with its mission statement. The request process aligns with [SBE Rule 0520-14-02](#) and is in alignment with the TDOE guidance [Local Education Agency and Public Charter School Waiver Guidance](#) (July 2025). All submissions should be sent on the HCS Waiver Request Form (Appendix B) and submitted via email to choosehamilton@hcde.org. A recommendation will be completed by the HCS charter office using feedback from experts as needed, including legal guidance. All waivers will remain in effect for a period of one year from the time the waiver is granted unless otherwise noted.

All charter schools are required to submit a current list of accepted waivers to the authorizer no later than August 31 each year. Additionally, schools must promptly notify the authorizer of any new waivers obtained during the school year to ensure accurate and up-to-date records.

Data and Assessments

All public charter schools are held accountable for student academic performance through both state law and the performance framework. The performance framework considers measures of student academic growth, academic proficiency status, college and career readiness, and improvement in college and career readiness over time. HCS may also consider student engagement, enrollment rates, student attrition, and parent and community satisfaction.

Testing Requirements

As a part of their accountability, all charter schools, regardless of any waivers, must administer the required state accountability assessments to monitor student academic performance. They are:

- TCAP (grades 3-8)
- ACT and SAT (ACT is required for all Tennessee 11th graders prior to their senior year; SAT is optional)
- TCAP End of Course assessments
- DLM/Kite for Students with Disabilities
- TCAP-Alt for Students with Disabilities
- ELPA21 for English Learners
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – required for grades 4,8, and 12 at select schools annually)

A Building Testing Coordinator (BTC) must be identified yearly. The BTCs name should be shared with the LEA to ensure information is shared throughout the year. BTCs must attend one of the BTC Live presentations that TDOE provides. Sessions are offered in the Fall and Spring. On occasion, the Spring session will provide additional information based on feedback from the Fall sessions. BTCs can attend the presentations that are offered locally or at a different location in TN. The list of locations will be shared annually.

Furthermore, all charter schools in Tennessee must have:

- A plan for evaluating student performance throughout the school year;
- Assessments that will be used to measure student progress towards achievement of the school's student performance standards with a rationale that explains how the assessments were chosen based on the population of students served by the school;
- The timeline for achievement of academic goals and standards as outlined in the

charter contract; and

- The procedures for taking corrective action in the event that pupil performance at the charter school falls below such standards, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

HCS Testing and Accountability support charter schools in various ways. These include:

HCS Provided Supports	Supports Not Provided by HCS
Cognos Access	Data analysis
School level data from state data releases	
TCAP quick scores	
Raw data from the data warehouse	
Basic information from the state on summer programming	
BTC Meetings and Support	

Annual Reporting Requirements

Per Tennessee charter law TCA § 49-13-120, the governing body of a charter school must make an annual progress report to the authorizer and to the commissioner of education.

The report must contain the following information:

- The progress of the charter school towards achieving the goals outlined in the school's charter contract; and
- Financial records of the charter school including revenues and expenditures; and
- A detailed accounting, including amounts and sources, of all funds received by the charter school other than the funds received under TCA § 49-13-112(a).

See [Annual Report Guidance](#) from the Tennessee Department of Education.

Chapter 4: Finance

Financial Reporting Requirements to the District

The charter school shall comply with state financial and budget rules, regulations, and financial reporting requirements as set forth in Tennessee Charter Law.

TCA § 49-13-127 requires that the governing body of each charter school shall conduct an independent audit of all accounts and records, including internal school activity and cafeteria funds.

The audit is to be completed as soon as is practical after June 30 of each year and is to be submitted to the comptroller of the treasury, the local board of education, and the commissioner of education.

The comptroller of the treasury will ensure that each audit is prepared in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and determine if the audits meet minimum audit standards and regulations. The comptroller of the treasury also has the authority to audit any books and records, including internal school activity and cafeteria funds of any charter school when it deemed necessary or appropriate.

A charter management organization (CMO) may comply with the audit requirement by submitting one (1) audit for all the charter schools it operates in Tennessee provided that such audit includes all the information required under TCA § 49-13-127.

In the event that a school is put on probationary status due to financial issues, the district may require additional financial documents in order to assess the fiscal picture and to determine if the governing body is fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities.

Annual Authorizer Fee

In accordance with TCA § 49-13-128, HCS, as authorizer, will receive from each charter school an authorizer fee that is a percentage of the charter school's per student state and local funding as allocated under TCA § 49-13-112. This annual authorizer fee shall be the lesser of three percent (3%) of the annual per student state and local funding or \$35,000 dollars per school.

Approved Yearly Budget

A governing board approved yearly budget is due to the HCS district no later than July 15 of each year.

Finances - Closure of a Charter School

In the event of a school closure, whether through revocation or voluntary closure, the

charter school's governing body will work with the district to submit the following financial documents:

- Financial statements to date that include all revenues and expenses, and all anticipated revenues and expenses up to and after closing.

NOTE: It is prohibited under Tennessee law for a district/authorizer to assume any debt from a charter school.

- The disposition of school funds
- The disposition of school assets
- A closing audit pursuant to TCA § 49-13-112

The governing body of a charter school that is closing shall continue to meet as necessary to close down school operations, manage school finances, allocate resources, and facilitate the closure. All vendor invoices, bank loans, lines of credit, grant funding, and federal funds are the sole responsibility of the governing body of the charter school.

Chapter 5: Human Resources

Teachers and Personnel

Under Tennessee charter law, teachers in a charter school are employees of the charter school or CMO, and not the district. Charter schools must be non-profit organizations in Tennessee, and as such can hire their own personnel and set their own wage and benefit packages.

However, Tennessee charter law does require that teachers be licensed in Tennessee. It is the charter schools responsibility to ensure all employees are properly credentialed and background checked. See the Tennessee educator website <https://www.tn.gov/education/educators/licensing/educator-licensure.html> for information on licensure requirements.

Background and Fingerprinting

As per TCA § 49-5-413, every employee of a charter school must undergo a background check and fingerprinting. It is up to each individual school whether or not they pay for this service or require the applicants to pay for their background checks.

In addition, any vendor, volunteer, bus driver, or person who regularly provides services within the school and has direct contact with students will also require a background check and fingerprinting.

Chapter 6: Operations

Enrollment and Allocation of Funds

Participation in a public charter school is based on parent and student choice. The school is open to any student residing within the geographic boundaries of the authorizing LEA. Any student who submits a timely application shall be enrolled, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of the school. If a lottery must be conducted, enrollment preference must be given in the following order, as per TCA § 49-13-113:

- Students enrolled in a pre-K program operated by the charter school
- Students who are economically disadvantaged as provided in subdivision (d)(5), if the enrollment preference is used by the public charter school
- Students enrolled in a charter school that have an articulation agreement with the enrolling charter school, providing that the articulation agreement has been approved by HCS
- Siblings of students already enrolled in the charter school
- Students residing within the geographic boundaries of HCS who were enrolled in another public school during the previous year

Preference may also be given to children of a teacher or member of the governing board of the charter school, not to exceed ten percent (10%) of total enrollment or 25 students, whichever is less.

In accordance with TCA § 49-13-112, funding is allocated to charter schools based on an amount equal to the per student state and local funds. **The amount allocated changes each year based on the school's student enrollment.** Charter schools are also allocated federal funds such as Title I and ESEA funds.

HCS will distribute the portion of local funds it expects to receive in no fewer than nine (9) equal installments to the charter schools. Funds may be adjusted, at a minimum, in October, February, and June, based on changes in revenue, student enrollment, or student services. All funds received by a charter school will be spent according to the yearly budget submitted by the governing body, subject to the requirements of federal and state law.

Each year, the HCS district releases enrollment projections for the following year for each school in the district. These projections are based on both school and district enrollment trends, as well as building capacity. Schools are asked to review these projections and provide any feedback prior to them being finalized. Charter schools are funded based on projections for the August and September funding payments, with a true-up in October, February, and June.

It should be noted that most districts, and the state, consider the October enrollment numbers to be the official student count. Students who enroll near the end of a 20 day count may not be officially “counted” for that month’s payment, thereby creating discrepancies at times.

Facilities

Charter schools may use capital outlay funds for purchasing, leasing, or lease-purchasing school facilities. If HCS has underutilized or vacant properties that have been reported as such to the Department of Education, those properties will be made available for any charter school for which they are suitable. If a charter school leases a district property, a lease will be executed with appropriate rent and a description of the responsibilities and obligations of both HCS and the charter organization under the terms of the lease.

Food Service

It is important to give our children healthy and nutritious meals to improve their chances of success and improve their learning opportunities. Research indicates eating habits affect learning. The USDA’s school meals programs help ensure all students have access to nutritious meals.

All charter schools are eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program offered by the state of Tennessee and may choose their own vendors from the state approved list to provide breakfast, lunch, and snacks to students who qualify.

All children in households receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Families First can get free meals regardless of income. Also, children can receive free- or reduced-price meals if their household’s gross income is at or below 130 percent of the poverty level. Those families with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, which cost no more than 40 cents. For additional information, please see the school nutrition website at <https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/health-and-safety/school-nutrition.html>.

Transportation

Tennessee charter law TCA § 49-13-114 ensures that, if a charter school offers transportation, then that transportation must be provided by the charter school and

becomes its sole responsibility. HCS will not be responsible for transportation of charter school students.

If the charter school chooses to provide transportation, it may not refuse to provide transportation to any student based on costs. For example, if a child requires a lift bus due to being in a wheelchair, the school cannot refuse to provide that accommodation because of its added costs.

If a charter school does provide transportation and chooses to contract with a third party provider for school buses, the buses and drivers must meet Tennessee requirements for safety and security as found on the Tennessee health and safety website. [Pupil Transportation \(tn.gov\)](http://www.tn.gov)

In electing to provide transportation services to students, the charter school becomes eligible for all funds that would have been spent by the district to provide such transportation to those students.

The charter school is also obligated by law to have a transportation supervisor that keeps their contact information updated with the state and completes their yearly required state in-service training. The charter school also must have their own compliant number with stickers on their buses. [TCA § 49-6-2116](#) provides further guidance.

PowerSchool Entry

Per the Charter School Agreement, Section 3.6.5, The Charter School shall ensure that student enrollment count records are maintained electronically on a system that is mutually acceptable to the Sponsor and the Chartering Authority. Additionally, all student information, including attendance and discipline, shall be entered into the Chartering Authority SIS.

Information that must be entered into PowerSchool includes the following:

- Daily Attendance
- Student Discipline (include Incident Reports, Mass Threat Reports, etc.)
- Student Grades
- ACT Scores
- Promotion Plans
- 3rd Grade Retention Law Determination
- ENL Language Status
- Accurate State Course Codes

Threat Assessments

The [Building Level Threat Assessment](#) is designed for use with students who are engaged in circumstances that suggest the potential aggression directed at other people.

[TCA §39-16-517](#) defines “Mass violence” as any act which a reasonable person would conclude could lead to the serious bodily injury, as defined in TCA § 39-11-106, or the death of two (2) or more persons.

If a threat of mass violence is suspected, a formal threat assessment must be conducted immediately in accordance with state and local policies. The Charter Office must be notified as soon as possible. For guidance on the appropriate steps to take, including notification protocols and intervention procedures, please refer to the **Threat Assessment Flowchart**, available [here](#).

Completed Threat Assessments should be shared with the Charter School Coordinator within 24 hours of the event.

Additional Security Resources and Tennessee State Laws can be found [here](#).

Discipline Notifications

All student discipline infractions must be entered into the Incident section of PowerSchool. If a suspension is issued as a disciplinary action, the incident report must be completed in full and reflected accordingly in the Attendance section. It is essential that all fields within the incident report are completed accurately and provide a clear and thorough account of the incident.

For Exceptional Education (Ex Ed) students, the HCS Ex Ed Behavior Team must be consulted to determine whether a Manifestation Determination meeting is required. A manifestation determination meeting is **mandatory** for any Ex Ed student approaching **10 days of suspension**, and an **HCS representative must be present** at that meeting.

If a student is expelled or receives a long-term suspension, the Charter School Office must be notified immediately. In these cases, families must be informed of the student’s rights, including the right to appeal the decision directly to the Charter School. If the Charter appeal upholds the expulsion or suspension, families may then request a Disciplinary Hearing Authority (DHA) hearing through HCS. If a family chooses to proceed with a DHA hearing, the student must be withdrawn from the charter school once the DHA meeting date is established.

Under no circumstances should a student be released from a charter school prior to a receiving school formally requesting a records transfer.

Transfer Policy Between HCS and Hamilton County Charter Schools

As stated in the **Agreement Form for Charter Parents (Appendix C)**, while Hamilton County charter schools do have the autonomy to run their schools, they also serve children of Hamilton County. HCS believes we both share the responsibility of serving all children of Hamilton

County. Parents are often looking for an alternative to their zone school, and charter schools often offer something different. However, sometimes things do not work out and for a variety of reasons, and families need to return to their zone school. Below are the parameters around possible transfer to and from charter schools in Hamilton County.

- HCS students may transfer to a charter school during the school year.
- Charter school students may transfer back to their zone HCS school under the following guidelines:
 - **Transfers occur on the following dates. If a student desires a transfer, they must stay at their charter school until these dates.**
 - August - No transfers
 - September 10
 - October 10
 - November 10
 - December 10
 - January 10
 - February 10
 - March 10
 - None in 4th quarter

Exceptions to the Transfer Dates

- Transfers that involve the McKinney-Vento Act, Exceptional Education, or English Language Learners can be transferred outside of the above dates.
- **Discipline Issues**
- If a student returns to HCS via a long term or zero tolerance suspension, they must first go through the charter school’s appeal process and provide proof of that. They would then withdraw from the charter school and proceed to HCS’ DHA process before entering their zone school.
- If a student is currently suspended they must fulfill that suspension and/or go through the appeal processes mentioned above.
- If a student is transferring to HCS and has an extensive discipline history, a discipline review will take place prior to the transfer. This could include an intake meeting with the family and school, a meeting between the releasing principal and the receiving principal. A behavior plan may be put in place or other additional support.
- **High School Transfers to HCS**
- Seniors must be on track to graduate. If they are not, alternative HCS programs such as Opportunity High or the GSP program could be considered; however, charter schools have the same responsibility as the district to ensure ALL students meet graduation requirements and will be held accountable to fulfill that duty.

- **When a transfer occurs between HCS and a charter school, the following information should be shared between schools.**
- Ex Ed information
- Discipline report
- Active discipline - is there disciplinary action taking place actively?
- Attendance
- Academics
- Other pertinent information

Epicenter Compliance Portal

- Epicenter is the mandatory online submission portal used by the Charter Office to collect required documentation and monitor compliance throughout the year. Charter schools will use Epicenter to upload required documents or sign off on certificates of completion, depending on the submission type. The system will provide automated reminders and timestamp all submissions for accountability and tracking purposes.
- Training and technical support will be provided by HCS to assist charter staff in navigating the platform. Each charter school is responsible for annually notifying the HCS Charter Office of all employees who should have access to the Epicenter platform.

Chapter 7: Student Support Services

English Language Learners

[Tennessee Rules and Regulations](#) require that students whose first language is other than English and who are limited in their English language proficiency be provided with a specially designed alternative language program. [TRR/MS 0520-01-19.].

This specially designed language program is English as a Second Language (ESL). ESL programs must be delivered by an endorsed ESL teacher using the ESL curriculum. The ESL curriculum is a general set of English language acquisition standards that should be used in conjunction with content standards. These standards address the language support necessary to enable the English Learner (EL) to access the grade level content curriculum by providing a bridge for ELs to the academic content curriculum. Tennessee adopted the English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards as assessed by the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) in 2024.

Charter schools are expected to adhere to the English Language learner ELPA21 framework and associated assessments. See [Resources – ELPA21](#) for additional information.

If you have questions about the ELPA21 framework or associated assessments, please reach out to Marisol Jimenez at jimenez_fulvia@hcde.org.

Please keep in mind, all Charter Schools are responsible for screening students and creating an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for all ELs. The screener must be administered by an allocated, certified, trained Charter School staff member. Failure to complete the ILP process will impact funding. Based on ENL enrollment, the Charter School is responsible for staffing a certified ENL teacher. [If there are any students who qualify for ESL services, a certified ESL teacher should be on staff to provide the required services.] The teacher's caseload will abide by the state's 35 students:1 teacher ratio requirement. Students who require ESL services will receive a minimum of 1 hour per day using approved ESL curriculum. The HCS ESL department is able to provide support as needed. To request support, please send an email to ilphelpdesk@hcde.org.

As a district, HCS is committed to supporting our EL students. It is important to keep in mind that some supports are provided and funded by the LEA while others are the responsibility of the Charter School.

HCS Provided Supports	Supports Not Provided by HCS
ILP Supports - requests made via HelpDesk ilphelpdesk@hcde.org	Curriculum and/or materials
Single Sign On (SSO) Supports	Curriculum Mapping
ENL teachers are invited to PD sessions	Stipends for PD attendance
Provide ENL Standards support	CANVAS Access
Provide ENL resources through Google Drive	ENL teachers
ELPA21 Training	HCS Staff does not complete ENL screeners.
ALT-ELPA21 Screener	Interpreters
Support the waiver process as necessary	
Assist in school site visits	
Provide access to ELlevation to all ENL teachers	
Serve as consultants for programmatic models and compliance	
Record Reviews	
BTC Support through the Testing and Accountability Department	

Special Education

Students with disabilities are to be educated in the least restrictive

environment that is beneficial to their academic advancement. Special education services are both state and federally mandated and charter schools are expected to serve students with disabilities in accordance with those laws. Please see [Special Education](#) for additional information about Tennessee standards for serving students with disabilities.

Further information can be found in the Tennessee Special Education Framework here: [Special Education Framework Updated August 2018](#)

Charter Schools have a responsibility to serve students with disabilities and to honor the students' IEPs as written. There is no exemption to IDEA and students cannot be denied a seat due to their disability and/or needs. Charter schools are charged with implementation regardless of staffing, physical space, resources, etc.

When scheduling students, it is important to consider the number of Ex Ed students in each General Education classroom. The classroom makeup should consist of less than 50% Exceptional Education students to be considered a General Education setting.

Service logs should be submitted to the HCS Exceptional Education Department on a monthly basis so invoices can be paid out.

The Hamilton County Schools Exceptional Education department provides numerous supports to Charter Schools. These include:

HCS Provided Supports	Supports Not Provided by HCS
Access to lead staff	Special programs (e.g., S.O.A.R., Dawn School, Washington Alternative)
Professional Development *Sign Up through KickUp	Staffing for services written into an IEP (e.g., SLPs, OTs, PTs).
Access to the Ex Ed Compliance Landing Page	
Support for Manifestation Meetings	
Invited to Department Chair Meetings	
Child Find Supports	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide testing materials - Provide School Psychologist for testing purposes only - Provide SLP for testing purposes only 	
Support the Due Process and Administrative Complaint procedures	
Assist with monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PowerSchool - Suspensions - IEPs 	

SEAD - Social Emotional and Academic Development

SEAD programs are an important part of any school. The support that school counselors, social workers, and college and career counselors provide students and their families ensures that the whole-child is being educated. Through their work, the school is able to work with students, families, communities, faculties and staff to address issues that have a substantial impact on student academic, personal/social and career development. As our charter schools strive to meet the needs of all students, the HCS SEAD department is available for assistance. The following supports are provided:

HCS Provided Supports	Supports Not Provided by HCS
Access to Professional Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social Workers ● School Counselors ● 504 Coordinators ● Student Success Planning ● Student Support Coaches 	Curriculum
SEAD Handbook	Staffing
New Counselor Training	

504 Supports	
Senior Transcript Audits	
Access to the Google Drive	

Career and Technical Education - CTE

Career and Technical Education opportunities have increased in schools throughout the State of Tennessee. These programs are found within K-12 and postsecondary education systems with the primary goal of increasing the skilled workforce available to high-demand industries in the state. Another goal is to help students learn about, experience, and consider potential careers and the education pathways that are needed to reach them.

CTE comprises programs of sequenced courses aligned with local industry needs, based on Tennessee’s regional economic and workforce development sectors. Students taking CTE courses have the opportunity to build specific skills and knowledge required to be successful in a wide variety of potential occupations.

CTE courses are approved by the State Board of Education as part of the Tennessee academic standards. CTE classes require a course code to be entered into PowerSchool. This course code is obtained after the teacher’s certification has been verified. If a waiver is needed, the waiver must be approved first and documentation of the waiver must be submitted to the Charter School Office. The full list of CTE Programs of Study can be found [here](#).

CTE funding comes from Hamilton County Schools General Purpose funding, as well as Federal Grants (e.g, Perkins V Basic). Perkins V Basic Dollars are a lump sum that are not distributed to individual schools. Anything purchased or funded through Perkins Dollars is shared with Charter and HCS schools equitably. Anything purchased through GP funds by the District is purchased based on strategic planning purposes. Charter schools are encouraged to consider their individual school’s CTE needs when allocating their own GP funds.

Due to the Perkins V Act, Career and Technical Education courses (all course codes that start with a C) are federally monitored. All Charter Schools who have CTE course codes on their schedules are required to complete the Size, Scope, and Quality Indicators (SSQI) paperwork. Questions around Size,

Scope, and Quality Indicator requirements can be requested by the Charter School to the Office of Future Ready Students. SSQIs will be collected via a Google Drive through the HCS Charter School Office. More information around SSQI indicators can be found at [SSQI_Feb2020202.pdf \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/files/education/assessment/SSQI_Feb2020202.pdf)

The following table provides further clarification.

HCS Provided Supports (Perkins Based Funding)	Supports Not Provided by HCS
Professional Development Opportunities	CANVAS Access
Industry Certification Vouchers that align with the district’s course work trajectories	Professional Development Stipends
Access to CTE Coaches and course Scope and Sequences	Consumable Supply Funding
Software Access to Previously Purchased Programs	Travel Expense Reimbursements
Buses for Get Future Ready	Maintenance and Repair of equipment
SSQI Documentation Support	
Course Code Support	
Teacher Certification Support	

Summary

It is the policy of the charter school office to be collaborative with our charter schools and to encourage their success. It is our hope that the guidance found in this handbook will provide helpful information to our schools as they accept the challenge of educating the next generation.

We hope you will reach out to the charter office with any questions or concerns.

Appendix

2025 - 2026

A	Timeline of Events
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B	Charter School Waiver Request Form
C	Annual Charter Agreement Form - Parents
D	Charter School Closure and Revocation Policy and Procedures Manual

Appendix A - Timeline of Events

Deadline	
August 31	<p>CMO Financial Audit</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-127(a)(2)</p> <p>Reporting: All CMOs operating a charter school in this state shall file an annual financial report with the comptroller of the treasury detailing transactions between the CMO and any charter school operated by the CMO in this state.</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For the fiscal year ending June 30; - Filed in a form prescribed by the comptroller of the treasury; and - Filed by the CMO with the comptroller of the treasury no later than August 31 of each year. <p>Template provided by comptroller.</p>
September 1 October 1	<p>Charter Amendment Application - Fall</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-110(d) and Charter Commission Rule 1185-01-01-.04</p> <p>Deadline: The year preceding the school year in which proposed amendment will take place – If the due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday or</p>

	<p>state-observed holiday, the deadline shall be due on the next business day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of Intent: September 1 • Application: October 1 <p>Reporting: Each charter operator that desires to materially modify any provision within its charter agreement shall file an amendment application.</p> <p>Requirements: The governing body of the charter school may file an amendment petition letter of intent with the authorizer by September 1 of the school year preceding the school year in which the proposed amendment will take effect for any material modification. The governing body of a charter school that submits its letter of intent shall file an amendment application with the authorizer by October 1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance and application materials are located on the department's website.
October 1	<p>Annual Progress and Financial Report</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-120(a)</p> <p>Reporting: Charter school’s governing body submits annual progress report to authorizer and the department.</p>

	<p>Requirements: The report must contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – progress towards achieving the goals outlined in the school's charter agreement; – financial records of the charter school, including revenues and expenditures; and – a detailed accounting, including the amounts and sources, of all funds received by the charter school (outside of funds received under T.C.A. § 49-13-112(a)). Guidance is available on the department's website.
<p>January 15</p> <p>February 14</p>	<p>Charter Amendment Application - Winter</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-110(d) and Charter Commission Rule 1185-01-01-.04</p> <p>Deadline: The year preceding the school year in which proposed amendment will take place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If the due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday or state-observed holiday, the deadline shall be due on the next business day. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of Intent: January 15 • Application: February 14 <p>Reporting: Each charter operator that desires to materially modify any provision within its charter agreement shall file an amendment application.</p> <p>Requirements: – The governing body of the charter school may file an amendment petition letter of intent with the authorizer by</p>

	<p>January 15 of the school year preceding the school year in which the proposed amendment will take effect for any material modification. The governing body of a charter school that submits its letter of intent shall file an amendment application with the authorizer by February 14.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Guidance and application materials are available on the department's website.</p>
<p>April 1</p>	<p>Charter Renewal Application</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-121</p> <p>Deadline: April 1 of the year prior to the year in which the charter expires.</p> <p>Reporting: Prior to the expiration of a charter school's charter agreement, a school must submit a renewal application to continue operation and renew the charter agreement with their authorizer.</p> <p>Requirements: Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-121 sets forth the procedures by which a renewal application may be submitted. A charter school must submit a renewal application to its authorizer no later than April 1 of the year prior to the year in which its charter agreement expires.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Guidance and application materials are available on the department's website.</p>

Annually	<p>Annual Board Training Documentation</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-111(o)</p> <p>Reporting: The governing body shall conduct at least one (1) annual board training course and shall provide documentation of such training to the authorizer. All training courses must be approved by the state board of education.</p> <p>Requirements: Provide documentation of such training to the authorizer. All training courses must be approved by the state board of education.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> State Board approved trainings</p>
Before the lottery and After the lottery	<p>Lottery Certification</p> <p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-113(d)(7)(A)</p> <p>Reporting: Charter schools provide certification of their lottery process. A charter school may request that the department review and approve the lottery process.</p> <p>Requirements: A charter school shall provide to the department certification by an independent accounting firm or by a law firm that each lottery conducted for enrollment purposes complied with the requirements of this section. In lieu of such certification, a charter school may request that the</p>

	<p>department review and approve the lottery process.</p>
<p>As soon as practical after June 30</p>	<p>Source: T.C.A. § 49-13-127(b)</p> <p>Reporting: Charter schools provide audit reports to authorizer, the Department, and comptroller of the treasury.</p> <p>Requirements: Notifying the Department that the audit has been provided to and posted by comptroller suffices as delivery to the commissioner.</p>

Appendix B



Charter School Waiver Request Form

Charter School Name: _____

Charter School Contact Name: _____

Contact Title: _____

Phone: (____) - ____ - _____ EXT: _____

Email address: _____

Term of the charter contract: ___/___/___ though ___/___/___ (MM/DD/YY)

Effective date of waiver being requested: _____

Please include the following waiver information on the Charter School letterhead in an attachment:

- 1. List the statute(s) and/or board rule(s) for which waiver is being requested
- 2. Mission and goals of the charter school as contained in the application filed with the local board of education pursuant to § 49-13-107
- 3. Explanation of how the statute(s) and/or state board rule(s) inhibits or hinders the charter school's ability to meet its goals or comply with its mission statement

Waiver Process: Hamilton County Schools will review the requests and either grant or deny them within 30 days of receipt. All waivers approved by the chartering authority shall be effective for the term of the charter contract unless otherwise stated. HCS will not consider incomplete requests.

Please submit this waiver request to the HCS Charter Coordinator, Fannie Moore at moore_f@hcde.org

Print Name: _____ Charter School Contact (Signature): _____

Date: _____ Approved: _____ Denied: _____

Reason for Denial:

Appendix C

Annual Charter Agreement Form for Charter Parents

Hamilton County has a variety of schools and programs for families to choose from. Charter schools are one of the many options. We support making the school choice selection that is best for your student and because of that we want to make sure that parents are doing their research and understand the school they are committing to for the year. We do understand that unforeseen circumstances arise from time to time and a transfer back to your zone HCS school may need to occur. We ask that before requesting a transfer, parents communicate with the charter school and try to resolve whatever the issue might be. If no resolution can be reached, and the family still wants to transfer, the transferring school will email the receiving HCS school and Cc the Charter School Office of the intention. If the student is under suspension, transfers **MUST** initiate from the Charter Office at HCS.

By signing this agreement, I am stating that I have read the guidelines regarding a transfer from a charter school to my zone HCS school.

This statement should be signed annually and returned to your student's charter school for record.

I _____ have read and understand the guidelines for

Parent's name

transfer back to my Hamilton County zone school. By signing this, I also agree to communicate with my student's charter school if there are any issues and exhaust every avenue to resolve those issues prior to requesting transfer. I also understand that if my student is a senior, a transfer may not be granted and that my student's charter school is responsible to do everything they can to support my student.

Parent Signature

Student's name

Student's Charter School

Date

Guidelines for Charter Transfer Back to HCS Zone School

- Charter school students may transfer back to their zone school under the following guidelines
 - **Transfers occur on the following dates. If a student desires a transfer, they must stay at their charter school until these dates.**
 - August - No transfers
 - September 10
 - October 10
 - November 10
 - December 10
 - January 10
 - February 10
 - March 10
 - None in 4th quarter
 - **Exceptions to the Transfer Dates**
 - Transfers that involve the McKinney-Vento Act, Exceptional Education, or English Language Learners can be transferred outside the above dates.
 - **Discipline Issues**
 - If a student returns to HCS via a long term or zero tolerance suspension, they must first go through the charter school's appeal process and provide proof of that. They would then withdraw from the charter school and proceed to HCS' DHA process before entering their zone school.
 - If a student is currently suspended they must fulfill that suspension and/or go through the appeal processes mentioned above.
 - If a student is transferring to HCS and has an extensive discipline history, a discipline review will take place prior to the transfer. This could include an intake meeting with the family and school, a meeting between the releasing principal and the receiving principal. A behavior plan may be put in place or other additional support.
 - **High School Transfers**

- Seniors must be on track to graduate. If they are not, alternative HCS programs such as Opportunity High or the GSP program could be considered, however, charter schools have the same responsibility as the district to ensure ALL students meet graduation requirements and will be held accountable to fulfill that duty.
- **When a transfer occurs between HCS and a charter school, the following information should be shared between schools.**
 - Ex Ed information
 - Discipline report
 - Active discipline - is there disciplinary action taking place actively?
 - Attendance
 - Academics
 - Other pertinent information

Appendix D



HAMILTON
COUNTY
SCHOOLS

**Charter School Closure and
Revocation
Policy and Procedures Manual**

Office of School Choice - Charter Schools Mission:

The HCS Charter Schools Office will practice rigorous charter school authorization, provide meaningful support, and protect school choice in order to uphold high academic standards, create fair and equitable opportunities, and improve outcomes for students and families in Hamilton County.

The Office of School Choice recognizes that starting and managing a charter school is hard work, and requires tremendous commitment and determination, all within an often uncertain environment full of significant challenges.

All of those who embark on this journey deserve our deepest respect for embracing the challenge of educating the next generation of students. But hard work and a belief that, given time, a school can show modest gains is not enough.

While it is the policy of the Office School Choice to be collaborative with the charter schools and to encourage their success, charter schools exist to achieve meaningful results for their students as demonstrated by a sound body of evidence. Charter schools that cannot deliver results showing significant student achievement gains must be closed in accordance with guidelines from the state. The Office of School Choice has a responsibility to the students, parents, stakeholders and the broader public to ensure a school that is not performing is closed and those students affected are transferred to schools where they can be successful. Appendix A outlines the procedures the Office of School Choice may take when a school is clearly not meeting standards, up to and including a closure recommendation.

There are three ways a charter school can be closed: it can voluntarily surrender its charter, the Hamilton County Board of Education can choose not to renew a charter, or the charter can be revoked.

As outlined in the Accountability Framework, the Office of School Choice looks at many factors when exercising oversight of charter schools. In broad terms, the factors include:

- Academic Performance
- Operational Performance
- Financial Stability

A charter school in the bottom 5% of the state's academic accountability system and labeled as a priority school will be automatically closed at the end of the school year, in accordance with Tennessee state law.

Besides poor academic outcomes, a charter school may have their charter revoked for the following reasons:

- Serious violations of law;
- Material and substantial violation of the charter contract
- Fiscal mismanagement

Closure Procedure

A decision to revoke a charter, or not renew a charter, takes place at the end of the school year unless a school meets the criteria outlined in Tennessee Charter Law that allows immediate closure. TCA §49-13-122(f) states "Except in cases of fraud, misappropriation of funds, flagrant disregard of the charter agreement or similar conduct, a decision to revoke a charter agreement shall become effective at the close of the school year".

Upon reaching the decision to close a charter school has been made, the Office of School Choice has three primary goals to be accomplished:

- Providing educational services in accordance with the charter contract until the end of the school year, or the agreed upon date when instruction will cease.
- Reassigning students to schools that meet their educational needs.
- Addressing the school's financial, legal and reporting obligations.

These goals will be given the highest priority during the closure process. The attached framework and timeline in Appendix A will be followed as it applies. Some tasks will not apply, depending on the particular school being closed. The Office of School Choice will work closely with the school's governing board prior to the beginning of closure proceedings to agree on which tasks are necessary and outline how the Office of School Choice intends to supervise the closure. Responsible parties and completion dates will be agreed upon to ensure a transparent and smooth closure, and the Office of School Choice staff will attend parent and community meetings to explain not only the mechanics of the closure process, but exactly why the school is being closed.

Appendix A – Procedures for Sub-Standard Performance of a Charter School

Status*	Possible Triggers	Possible Actions/Consequences
Notice of Concern	Signs of weak performance: identified through routine monitoring, through implementation, compliance or performance review, or by other means identified by the District	Letter to the governing board detailing areas of concern
Notice of Deficiency	Failure to meet multiple performance targets; Failure to comply with applicable state laws and/or district policies; Failure to comply with terms of the charter	Letter to the governing board detailing areas of deficiency with a requirement that a Performance Improvement Plan is developed and implemented (with specific improvements, objectives, timelines, measures). The Performance Improvement Plan must be approved by the Office of School Choice.
Notice of Probation	Continued failure to meet performance targets; Failure to meet objectives set forth in the Performance Improvement Plan; Continued failure to comply with applicable state laws and/or district policies; Continued failure to comply with conditions of the charter agreement	Letter to governing board to serve as notification of probationary status and outlining terms of probation; Office of School Choice creates a Corrective Action Plan with the charter school that addresses deficits and has measurable outcomes, a timeline and very specific improvement expectations.
Charter Review	Failure to successfully address the terms of the probation; flagrant disregard of the charter agreement (TCA 49-13-122(d); fraud, misappropriation of funds (TCA 49-13-122(d); extended pattern of failure to comply with applicable law; expended pattern of failure to comply with the terms of the charter, including fiscal management and academic performance (inclusion on the Priority list of the bottom 5% of schools in the state; failure to meet required academic outcomes.	Recommendation to revoke, or not to revoke, the charter, or impose lesser sanctions (at this, or any point in the process, a school can voluntarily surrender its charter). Decision by the HCS Board of Education to commence or not commence revocation proceedings.

<p>Charter Revocation</p>	<p>Charter Review results in recommendation to revoke or school has done any of the following: committed a material violation of any conditions, standards or procedures set forth in the charter agreement; achievement of the state's accountability system; failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management.</p> <p>Except in cases of fraud, misappropriation of funds, flagrant disregard of the charter agreement or the provisions of chapter 49-13-122 or similar misconduct, or the failure to achieve academic goals and high academic outcomes two (2) consecutive years in a row, a decision to revoke shall become effective at the close of the academic year.</p>	<p>Letter stating reasons for proposed revocation to the school's governing board.</p> <p>Charter timeline (attached to this policy) goes into effect immediately.</p>
<p>*NOTE: The outlined procedures are <i>not</i> a step by step process. The Office of School Choice reserves the right to put schools at any status without going through the steps if more immediate actions are warranted.</p>		